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## BOOK REVIEWS

A HISTORY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE SINCE 1870. By Fred Lewis Pattee, Professor of English in the Pennsylvania State College. New York: The Century Company. \$2.00 net.

In the English department of colleges and in the pages of magazines the question whether American literature is to be regarded as a new "realm of gold" or as a dependency of English literature has been mildly agitated. To this question Professor Pattee gives a new answer, a compromise, in his recently published *History of American Literature Since 1870*. His contention is that, "despite Lowell's statement, it was not until after the Civil War that America achieved in any degree her literary independence." Before this time literature was in the hands of a class of men who had scant contact with the thoughts and habits of everyday people. "The houses of the Brahmins had only eastern windows. The souls of the whole school lived in the old lands of culture, and they visited these lands as often as they could, and, returning, brought back whole libraries of books which they eagerly translated." But the war unsettled social and economic conditions, produced revolutionary changes in industry, resulted in a freer intercourse between isolated sections and in migrations westward, and in general set men to thinking primarily about the problems, the ideals, and the life around them. To this upheaval was due an impetus in literature which found clear expression by 1870 and was unmistakably dominant until the nineties. It is this era, an era which he designates as the national in contrast with the preceding era of New England letters, that Professor Pattee sets himself to discuss. "One can say of the period," he declares, "what one may not say of earlier periods, that the mass of its writings could have been produced nowhere but in the United States."

A reader may be disposed to question the sharp distinction between the two generations. Is the earlier so derivative after all? That it is to a great extent Europe-eyed and conservative, the mention of Longfellow alone, who is Professor Pattee's special aversion, will perhaps indicate. But there are also indi-

cations that one side of the era is autochthonic (if we may use a word that often recurs in the volume). In New England itself consider the *Biglow Papers* and *Snow-Bound* (for of course Whittier belongs to the earlier group), and in the South consider the plain-spoken Americanism of A. B. Longstreet and Davy Crockett. Again, are we to assume that the writers of the national era are less provincial than the earlier writers? To glance at representative names—at Bret Harte, Joaquin Miller, Cable, Joel Chandler Harris, and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, for example—is to answer in the negative. Moreover we may hesitate to accept Professor Pattee's assertion that the national era "is as yet the greatest in our literary history." Even when we have added to such names as those just given the names of Lanier, Whitman, Mark Twain, and Howells (who is branded, somewhat justly, as a leader of "the classical reaction"), are we sure that the aggregate will outweigh the group which included Lowell, Longfellow, Whittier, Emerson, and Hawthorne? Without venturing a prophecy as to the comparative durability of the greater figures, we may say a word on the score of comprehensiveness. A list of the writers of the national era will show at once that in a surprising number of instances they are characterized not by the exploration and exploitation of limited fields, but by an unwillingness to grapple with the more massive literary forms. They turned to short poems; oftener still they turned to short stories. "It was a peculiarity of the whole period," admits Professor Pattee, "that nearly all of its writers of fiction should have been restricted in their powers of creation to the small effort rather than to the large. It was the age of cameos rather than canvases." Whether or not we are to expect the coming of the great American novelist, we cannot quite escape the impression that the writers of the national era may be, generally speaking, gatherers of the material which greater artists, when they appear, will use in synthetic ways.

A reader wonders at the outset whether Professor Pattee has no other test of literature than its robust expressiveness of actual and contemporary life. So strong indeed is the insistence upon the American mood and topic that some readers will not rid themselves of this first impression. But in reality Professor

Pattee has a marked sense of values, he condemns numerous writers on the ground that they are unmindful of the past, and he closes with vigorous commendation of that stubborn critical adversary of everything merely modern, Paul Elmer More. It is with ever-present standards and convictions that he studies the period. The work is anything but perfunctory, anything but merely approbatory. It is pioneer work well done. We find intelligent discussion of an array of writers whom historians of our literature have dismissed as too recent for their consideration, and in most instances we feel that the verdict will not be radically altered. The interpretation of tendencies and of their significance is also a worthy achievement. As Professor Pattee says, "The field is a new one: no book and no chapter of a book has ever attempted to handle it as a unit." The views that are advanced will not meet even now with complete acceptance, and it is but reasonable to suppose that they will be modified further by the investigations of scholarship; yet the study is likely to remain for years the most satisfactory we shall have, and it is certain to exert great influence upon research and interpretation in the future.

Unfortunately the style may not be praised so heartily as the substance. Professor Pattee is much given to that awkward type of sentence which begins with "There is" and adds a whole series of nouns, some of them plurals. The last three sentences on page 259 will yield two examples. Moreover, he too often adopts a rough-and-ready method of expression, as in this sentence on page 362: "The writer was Grace Elizabeth King, daughter of a prominent barrister of New Orleans, herself with a strain of Creole blood, educated at the fashionable Creole pension of the Mesdames Cenas—the Institute St. Denis of 'Monsieur Motte' and 'Pupasse'—bilingual like all the circle in which she moved, and later a resident for some two years in France—no wonder that from her stories breathes a Gallic atmosphere such as we find in no other work of the period."

GARLAND GREEVER.